

Efforts to make C'sted an economic hotspot underway

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ST. CROIX — Christiansted town will see a lot of action this weekend with the advent of a series of community-oriented events hosted by the Virgin Islands Enterprise Zone Commission, the Christiansted Community Alliance, the Department of Agriculture and other partners.

According to EZC Director Nadine Marchena-Kean, and Dery Calixte, EZC specialist, Christiansted has earned its place as one of four enterprise zones based on statistics from a 2002 census that indicated high levels of poverty in the town. Calixte noted that these statistics do not include the aftermath of the Hovensa closure. Typically, policymakers offer tax cuts, reduced regulations or other incentives to reward activities that will encourage economic growth in enterprise zones like Christiansted.

This weekend a number of activities designed to revitalize Christiansted town are scheduled to take place.

EZC Town Plan Competition:

EZC is inviting the community to view and vote on two competing town plans for Christiansted displayed inside the National Park Service's Steeple Building across the street from the Fort. The voting process began Wednesday and will continue through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day.

Each proposed town plan was submitted by architects who will remain anonymous until the end of the voting process. According to Kean, the architects are local and were present at an EZC-hosted event

where experts and the general public met to discuss issues affecting the town and plans for development earlier this year.

Kean said a good town plan would reflect the ideas discussed at the event, provide solutions for social and structural issues affecting the town, and provide suggestions for bringing people back to the historic town to spur economic, social and architectural development. She also said a good town plan might suggest how to preserve the history of the town while answering the question of "how we put our own mark on things" so that residents and visitors of the future can get a glimpse of what life is like right now.

"I wanna see a vision of Christiansted in 50 years that's based on the historic character of the town," said David Hayes, an owner of several properties in Christiansted town who voted for a town plan.

Hayes, a Christiansted baby by merit of his birth at Charles Harwood Hospital, called the present condition of Christiansted "deplorable." He said there were many reasons for that, including insufficient business activity, abandoned buildings and a perception of crime in town that he said is "far higher than reality." By a little after midday Wednesday, Hayes was one of 12 voters who participated.

Kean strongly encouraged all members of the community to place their votes so EZC can determine the level of support for whatever town plan is ultimately chosen. EZC will be applying for grants to implement some of the suggested features from the town plan that is

been selected via majority vote, according to Kean.

Some features of Town Plan A include an upgrade of Gallows Bay Dock, a sequearium at The Barracks Yard, improvements to the Christian "Shan" Hendricks Market, and other features. A few features of town Plan B include an elevated car garage and elevated boardwalk models; board walk extension and enhancement; a proposed University of the Virgin Islands VI Caribbean Cultural Center and Architecture School on the Old Barracks compound; an additional ferry dock facility in Gallows Bay, and other features.

Detailed written descriptions of each plan and a visual display of the proposed architectural designs and layouts are available to voters at the Steeple Building. Architects will not be physically present to explain their work.

Christiansted Community Alliance Community Events:

In efforts to "renew some life into Christiansted," the Christiansted Community Alliance will be hosting a series of events that cater to everyone, according to Alliance Coordinator Mary Deema.

"Our goal is just to get people to come and enjoy Christiansted. It's such a beautiful town," she said. "The town has great shops, great restaurants... We just need to get it up and going and thriving."

According to a release from The Alliance, events kick off Friday night with a Eddie Russell Band performance for Jazz in the Park at the National Park bandstand from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. After the free concert,

attendees are encouraged to visit restaurants in Christiansted for dinner.

A number of events will take place on Saturday:

10 a.m. – The public is invited to attend a free meditation class at the Kalmia Center on King Street.

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. – The gates of the Peter Carl Limpricht Park will be open to the public to view or buy the work of local artists, crafts, collectibles and plants. Local food will also be on sale. Pates from Thomases' Food Van, recently featured on the show "Bizarre Foods," also will be available.

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. – Friends of the Library will be hosting a book sale at the Florence Williams Public Library.

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. – The Lutheran Church community will be having a bake sale in front of the Parish Hall.

1 to 4 p.m. – There will be a story time event for children under the canopy of trees in Limpricht Park.

7 p.m. – The public is invited to watch a movie at the fort in Christiansted. This monthly event typically takes place on the last Saturday of each month.

The Christiansted Community Alliance is a group spawned as a result of the EZC hosted Christiansted town plan event held earlier this year. The group has challenged themselves to continuously come up with solutions to keep Christiansted alive.

Christian "Shan" Hendricks Market Revitalization:

The VI Department of Agriculture in partnership with The Alliance, the Office of the Gover-

nor, the Waste Management Authority and the VI Department of Public Works will be joining the Christiansted revitalization effort by inviting vendors to sell local produce or value market items made from local produce on Saturday at the Christian "Shan" Hendricks Market. The market event will take place from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

DOA Project Coordinator Audrey Brown is encouraging vendors to call 778-0997, extension 228, to inquire about space availability.

"There aren't much spaces available," she said.

According to Brown, once vendors have landed a space for the inaugural event, the space will be theirs to utilize free of charge for six months. After that, there is a charge of \$60 per table for six months or \$120 per table for a year.

"We expect for the impact to be long term and not just for a week or two," Agriculture Commissioner Louis Petersen said.

According to Petersen, the market revitalization effort is meant to "keep those dollars right here" and "re-stimulate economic activity in Christiansted." He also said the effort is expected to do at least two more things: help build a relationship between local producers and consumers, and provide another outlet for local farmers to sell their produce.

"This just adds another item on the calendar for the farmer," he said.

He invited the public to "buy local and eat fresh" in support of the farmers and the Christiansted revitalization effort.

DE JONGH:

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De Jongh resubmitted the proposed Fourth Amendment Agreement to the Legislature on Oct. 17 along with a document outlining clarifications requested by the senators.

Since a previous bill to ratify the Fourth Amendment Agreement was rejected by the Legislature on Aug. 7, de Jongh has engaged in ongoing discussions with members of the Legislature in an effort to address their concerns, according to a Government House news release. On Oct. 1, the Legislature adopted a resolution making several recommendations that were intended to "resolve the issues." The resolution passed by the Legislature puts in writing that a majority of senators will support the Fourth Amendment Agreement once certain concerns are addressed.

The governor said he is looking forward to the Legislature voting in favor of the agreement, which he said will put Hovensa in a position where it can move forward and begin the process to sell the refinery.

De Jongh said he is a little disappointed the vote didn't take place Wednesday because he thought the senators were going

to approve the agreement. Therefore, he said he was beginning to put in motion talking with the bankers for the sale and making sure the government would be involved in the process. He said there is some interest out there in terms of prospective buyers.

"A lot of the senators have called me and told me about individuals that have contacted them, and the bankers also for the company, I think, are ready to move forward," de Jongh said.

Sen. Samuel Sanes, who has supported the Hovensa agreement from the beginning, said he contacted a representative from one entity interested in purchasing the refinery on Wednesday to explain the delay on the vote. He said the representative was understanding, but indicated a desire to stay informed throughout the process.

"So far two companies have called me," Sanes said. "These are entities that are interested in purchasing the refinery."

If the Legislature would have approved the measure on Wednesday, the governor said forward progress could have already begun.

"Now we're just waiting until Nov. 4 to be able to have that action take place, and I'm optimistic that the senators will move forward," de Jongh said. "We've given the clarifications that they were looking for. We've given the documentation in terms of the legislation that's proposed, so I think everything is in place to be able to move forward..."

De Jongh said his administration is prepared to address any concerns the senators may have. He said he is looking forward to moving ahead with the agreement.

"We just need to get to the point where we could recognize and put some value into the refinery, both in terms of the jobs it can provide but also with respect to the income," he said.

The sales process is one that allows perspective buyers to purchase the property to not only continue operations as a refinery, but for any host of other options, de Jongh said. He said the Hovensa plant is a 2,000-acre facility situated in the middle of the island. He said the government simply needs to have economic activity at the facility. He said the government

would be involved in the entire sales process if the Senate ratifies the Hovensa agreement. He said the Legislature also will have a say after a buyer is selected by Hovensa.

"This is just a first step of multiple steps toward getting a new owner, but we've got to start and it starts on Nov. 4," de Jongh said. "I'm hopeful that on that date the senators will vote, they will ask their questions and we can move to the next step toward getting this resolved and moving forward and Hovensa can exit from the territory."

De Jongh noted that his administration has provided to the Senate a clarification from Hovensa's local legal counsel that included the signatures of Hovensa's two owners.

"So the senators, in fact, do have the original agreement and clarifications to the agreement which can be binding under Virgin Islands law," he said.

Malone, in his letter to de Jongh, asked the governor to insert changes requested by the senators into the actual Hovensa agreement and that his office resubmit it to the Legislature as a revised agreement. Malone noted that the bill sent to sena-

tors contained an addendum addressing some of the body's concerns, but that none of the issues to be addressed were actually incorporated into the agreement itself.

De Jongh said, however, that the documents are legally binding in their current form. He said the proposed Hovensa agreement and the document outlining the clarifications are both referenced within the legislation the Senate will consider approving on Nov. 4. If the Senate approved the legislation, he said it will become law.

"And we feel extremely comfortable that that is the case," de Jongh said. "The attorney general has provided me with an opinion that outlines that, so I feel that we have met all the requirements that the Senate needs with respect to passing the legislation and providing us with the authority to move forward on the sale, and we've got an AG's opinion that says that the form and the substance of what we've provided to them, in fact, is legal and once they pass it, it is the law of the land. They should feel extremely comfortable that we can move forward at that point."